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CHAPTER III

THE PERIOD OF WEANING

WEANING marks the end of the infancy period.[1] It is a gradual process for which the mother prepares the infant by substituting solid foods for milk and by coaxing the child to spend more and more time on the floor of the porch rather than sitting in her lap. When she eventually decides that he is mature enough, usually during the second or third year, she prevents further breast feeding. She chooses the time in accordance with the adequacy of her child rather than his chronological age, a sickly child being weaned later than a healthy one. Several informants stated that infants stop breast feeding of their own accord, but others said that the mother stops the flow of milk by daubing her nipples with the sap of the breadfruit tree, a thick, viscous fluid, which is used by the natives as glue. If the infant is very persistent in trying to continue to suck, the mother may tell him that a *marsalai*[2] has taken the place of her milk, sometimes emphasizing this story by placing a leech on her breast.

After he has been weaned, the child must learn to depend entirely on the diet of his parents. He becomes adept at drinking soup from coconut-shell bowls, learns to munch the sago briquettes which his mother has cooked for the family, and begins to eat meat with his sago just as his parents do. He also learns that he cannot eat whenever he is hungry, but

[1] Wof's stepson Kum supplied most information on this phase of the process of socialization. He was a bright lad between four and five years old. Merik, Way's son, was also in this period. He was an unhappy child of about Kum's age, who seemed to resent the birth of his younger brother Kadowan.

[2] *Marsalai* is the pidgin English term for a class of huge supernatural beings who dwell in the swamps surrounding the tribe. These monsters usually take the form of great snakes or crocodiles. The belief in these monsters is widespread both in New Guinea and in Australia (cf. M. Mead, "The Marsalai Cult among the Arapesh," *Oceania*, IV [1933], 37-51).

000 yet for we have only recently stumbled on it).

796 While John was joining in and trying to learn the dance step and songs
123 (which amused but did not anger the men) I sat in the house tamberan with
534 the older men and those not dancing and tried my skill with the wooden
trumpets. These are blown sporadically as are the flutes, and as the
[177] ordinary gongs are beaten. The trumpets have an interesting history. They
were captured from men from Avatip (on the Sepik below Malu) by the
grandfathers of the present older generation. They are finely carved wooden
cornucopias with a crocodile head motif at the closed end. The lip-piece
is on the side. I blew it quite easily the first time, but the men seem
[614] to make very hard work of it. The trumpets are now in the custody of
Kumbima sib.

796 In the late afternoon the men began to drop out to ornament themselves
in earnest. One man joined the dance with a man-killing spear, and the
[123] others increased the tempo. At about this time we began to get the feeling
that we were not wanted much longer, so when a couple of the men picked up
the two brace of yams and coconuts which had been given us, we took the hint
and headed for home.

128 These bare outlines of what we are doing and finding are becoming less
and less satisfactory. We know that it's the details that interest the
anthropologist, but to record all of same in this would be too long a task.
So we will skip over many of our notes on the last ceremony and become
796 impressionistic. At those ceremonies which we have seen so far, there
[171] has been nothing to compare with the amounts of food assembled for
Melanesian and Polynesian feasts. Everyone has a good meal and perhaps
a little left over, but one pig is made to go a long way. Another thing
which has struck us is the monotony of their singsings. There seems to be

533 February 2, 1937. Yesterday the gongs started beating at Soubundura, and they kept up all night. Flutes played intermittently. The people at Kumbima said that it wasn't much of a ceremony--there was little excitement compared to the Hokwi ceremony. The beat was similar to the Mdunkwi of Yambon. The gongs were still going this morning, and several people went by somewhat ornamented but without paint on their faces.

[171] [301] [302]

578 This morning while I was still in bed, I heard a scramble and then Fit ran down the path to his house yelling. He was chased by Mey who had a smoking firebrand in his hand and was belaboring Fit with it. Later Mey came in with a cut on his forehead. He said that he had called Fit names, Fit had lost his temper, and sworn at him. He had rushed Mey while he was sitting down, and cracked him on the head with his fist. Mey had scrambled up, grabbed a firebrand and threatened him. The spectators all thought it a good joke. Although Fit ran down to his house, there was no talk from the elders that I was aware of. Later Gwiyap and I were talking about it and he asked me if we fought the same way. I said no, that we more often played at fighting that way.

[522]

838 February 3, 1937. I woke up this morning and heard the voice of Ham in 522 Wisep's house. They were kidding him about sodomy. It was treated in a joking manner. He denied it and accused Marur and Wisep. He said that Marur had been having sexual intercourse with Wisep for a long time--this brought howls of laughter. The joking went on intermittently through breakfast. I told Marur to bring Ham to me, that I wanted to have intercourse with him. There was laughter, and Marur chased Ham, who ran away. Later Marur caught him and asked me if he should bring him now. I said, "No, he isn't big enough", but added that he, Marur, was about right. They laughed heartily at this, and Ham danced around Marur pointing his finger at him.

[123]

March 27, 1937.

856 [123] Owiyap and Pit asked if I had ever cut my genitals and scraped them with nettles. When I replied in the negative they inquired how was it that I had come to grow. They were so convinced that this is essential to growth that they were very surprised that white men could grow without it.

April 5, 1937.

838 171 Sodomy is not openly practiced, however Owiyap says that it is practiced at Yambon.

*115 When I talk with him about the attractiveness of Kwiya or Awa, although at first he talked avidly, he now seems embarrassed and changes the subject.

601 595 If a man has two wives the child calls them both ama (mother) unless the other wife is a widow of an uncle. Then he calls her ama or nawalaka (younger uncle and older aunt, respectively).

593 833 Intercourse after marriage is at the wife's instigation and not the man's.

April 15, 1937.

*115 291 Last night Owiyap was sitting in the mosquito netting and took off his "lap lap." He said he liked to walk about thus--he did not like to wear it.

*115 123 829 Talk turned to America, and he asked me a lot of questions, particularly about the status of black skins in America. I told him that they had houses and money, and worked just as white people do, and tried to convey that their status there was much higher in relation to whites than it was in New Guinea. He asked me if black boys married white women. I said that they sometimes did. Owiyap said that he would like to go to America and stay there. He said, "If I go to America, I'll be all-a same masta," (just like a white man).

*115 787 He had a long dream last night. A woman had died and was on a platform. He did not know who she was except that her name was Yumakwo. Wey was stabbing this woman with a rope which has the point of a spear. His daughter came up and held Owiyap by the arms and asked him to come with her into the bush, as she did not like what her father was doing.